

Historical fiction book reviews examples

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Introduction

Hamza Bogary's book, 'The Sheltered Quarter: A Tale of a Boyhood in Mecca' is a narration about the past life of a character that has irreversibly disappeared. The author describes the life in Mecca prior to the advent of oil. The book is based on Mecca's observations in Mecca and he uses art to express this part of his knowledge. He has managed to successfully bring out his knowledge into art through humor, empathy and his understanding about human nature. This makes his piece of work not only entertaining but also informative. The narrator, Muhaisin, has to deal with various aspects of the Arabian culture such as education, styles of clothing, religion and the status of women. The book is set before the advent of oil in Mecca.

In Ulfat Idibi's *Sabriya: Damascus bitter sweet* is a historical fiction series that helps the readers to appreciate art while at the same time learning from the past. The book aims to bring out the voices of the writers who have been given the recognition that they deserve at home and they are not recognized beyond their native lands. The art that has been employed in the book serves to help the reader appreciate the importance of art in understanding history. The book is set in the first half of the twentieth century, in the 1920s.

The Middle East fictional stories tend to talk about some of the experiences that the women in those regions had to put up with because of the roles that were defined by their gender. From these books, one can learn about women and their identity and how they served various roles within the society.

Women had to put up with oppressions that would be attributed to the roles

that the society had placed on them. This meant that whatever they did would have to be approved by the society otherwise they risked being condemned by the community members. Most of the fiction novels such as those in Bogary's work (Bogary 34) focused on the role of women with regards to the domestic pleasures such as weaving, needlecrafts, cooking and decoration. All portray women as being ornamental rather than functional. They could not be heard and the best that they could do is to make appearances. Such kinds of topics set the stage that women have specific roles that they are supposed to play within the society. They bring out women as being fit to serve and not able to delegate responsibilities that touch on people's lives.

Disadvantages of learning History from Fiction

The first disadvantage is that with fiction stories, it is more about the art than the facts at hand. Fiction here implies that one adjusts reality to make it look like it is real while the underlying factor is that they would like to make the story look as appealing as possible. It creates a situation whereby readers continue reading because of the art that has been employed in the book instead of analyzing the historical facts, opinions and patterns. Another disadvantage is the fact that fiction histories do not give an in-depth analysis that can allow for deductions to be made. The focus is on creating a lasting impression on the reader's feelings. Details such as the sequence of events, such as the years of occurrence, are not given much coverage in fiction novels. The emphasis is on what happened and where, instead of the lessons that a person can derive from these historical experiences. As such, these books are not informative and so not very educative (Ildibi & Peter 34).

Advantages and Disadvantages of using historical novels for studying

Advantages

Historical novels are good for getting to know how people felt about their historical experiences. They help in explanation about some events in the future so as to inform the readers about how things could have been possible. For instance, an event such as the election of Bill Clinton may not make sense to those who were born after that time or later on. By using historical fiction, they can relate to the events that occurred at that time in a better way. They make the historical figures more real and give them personality as compared to historical text. The fact that the historical experiences focus more on how they make the reader feel, they can also be used to teach about the author biasness that affects the way people get the information. Another advantage of using historical fiction is that it allows for one to have multiple objectives about the issue in discussion. It is important that people share their perspectives with regards to difference in issues.

Using historical fiction presents the reader with the opportunity of seeing the difference in their perspectives from those of their colleagues and that of the author. It will also inform the students about the interpretive nature of the historical lessons that they have by showing how the different authors deal with the various situations at hand. Another advantage is based on the fact that historical fiction presents the complexity of the various issues under discussion. Most of the issues in the historical context are multifaceted. For instance, if one is to present a topographical map about an issue, there will be different physical features seen in the map such as hills and valleys.

Simply reading historical excerpts and leaving it at that does not encourage

critical thinking in history. Fictional history will encourage critical thinking in light of historical perspectives (Bogary 34).

Disadvantages of using historical novels

The language used in historical novels is normally idiosyncratic. Historical novels are reactions of the authors to historical issues in most of the cases. This means that they will express historical issues based on their own feelings using different kinds of languages. They will give the historical issue under discussion a personalized approach and those who are reading the text may not get the actual picture or the real facts that they are supposed to be looking at. This is because they will be distracted with the emotional appeal of the issue under discussion. It could be an issue of significance but because the author does not find it important in the given scenario, the author may not give it the attention that it deserves and vice-versa. Another disadvantage is that these stories can become quickly out of date. It poses as a challenge to the reader since the language can easily be forgotten as soon as the information gets another meaning in another context. Fiction stories are not durable in majority of the cases because they appeal to the heart instead of appealing to the head. At times, the language is too ‘flowery’ to an extent that they become difficult to read and hence they can put off the reader. For some people, the challenge and the achievement of reading an authentic text for the first time is normally to get their motivation increase so that they keep reading, they are not motivated to read for information but rather for the sake of it (Ildibi & Peter 23).

Themes in relation to the books

Modernization

Artistic modernization of historical narrations depends on how the stories that are being discussed have been narrated to stay relevant despite the passage of time. Historical fiction in this case refers to the ability to bring out the symbolic images behind the historical realities by creating various impressions on the reader. In light of this, symbols and metaphors can be of great significance in the narration of histories but as time goes, they might lose meaning. Using fiction to narrate historical events can make the learning of historical lessons significant and so there is need to make the lessons as close to the present realities as possible. It ensures that the fictional historical lessons that are in the written context can stand the passage of time and they can be easily understood across generations. Modernization in Idibi and Peter's work comes about when the author tries to bring in the concept of how leadership influenced the life of the people through the narrator. He narrates the past events and brings out his expectations through the author. Bogary on the other hand redefines the role of women in the past and the current as having been passed with time. The historical fiction in particular brings attention to the overlapping boundaries that exist between the real world and the imaginary word that the author manages to create. The continuous occurrence of events such as the impact of the succeeding trends in modernization create value attached to the historical lessons that the author intends to tell his audience. As a result, if the leadership and the change in the economic lives of the people can relate to the historical narrations that are being explained in the

given context them they will stand the test of time. They will only become relevant if the intended audience are able to understand the information that they are being given and use it to understand their positions. If there is too much fiction that does not reflect the modernization developments in the present, the historical lessons will not be understood and the book will lose its meaning and relevance in trying to get people to understand their historical achievements.

Education

Education is also dynamic and so the ability of the historical fictions to stand the change of time requires that the target audience is able to relate with the excerpt. If the author writes with the target audience in mind being the school going children, they should factor in the importance of using simple language so as not to make the historical lessons boring. Students may find the historical lessons from the text informative but they may not dwell on reading between the lines if there is too much information or if the author has used a lot of words to explain a simple concept. On one end, the author has focused on educating the reader about what took place in history while on the other end the author has focused on basing his historical fiction on educating the reader is seen in the context of the author using too many words or relating the historical concepts to other facts to explain a simple fact in discussion (Ildibi & Peter 56). Too much information distracts the reader and so it is difficult to draw the relevant lessons from the text. Whenever an author decides to write some historical fiction book, they always target a class of people depending on the subject that they are writing about. For instance, if the objective of the author is to write about

people of a given social class, they will often use the language that those people can relate to best. In one of the texts, the author has chosen to speak about the issues that are affecting the women. Ulfat gives a personal account of her life and how the society perceived women to be inferior. Bogary has chosen to speak about how it feels to belong to a given social class based on gender (Bogary 78). In both of these cases, the language that will be used is different since one will use a more persuasive language while the other will use an affirmative tone to write the fiction. Bogary's work is more of an affirmative tone when the author recounts and relates what his characters have to face in the society. Ulfat on the other hand tries to persuade the author to get into the characters' shoes and feel the moments.

Religion

Religion plays an important role in defining the kinds of attitudes that a person is likely to have towards various issues in the society. In both societies, religion determines the way these people live their lives and the social roles that the community members have been given. Muslim is the main religion in the middle east and for every decision that the people make they have to do it with regards to the Muslim religion. In one context, religion has been used to explain how people would go about relating to other people. Specifically, Ulfat states that with her religion, women cannot make major decisions that touch on their lives since the muslim religion does not permit it. In the other book, the religion plays a huge role in defining how they value their attitudes towards sensitive issues in life (Bogary 34). For instance, Bogary uses Muhaisin to explain how he related with his family,

though not much has been explained in terms of his relationships with his mother.

Family Life

There is not much which has been discussed in relation to the family life in both contexts. In Bogary's work, women are central to the wellbeing of the family from their roles in taking care of the children and their spouses. In Idlibi and Peter's work, there has not been much focus on the role of the family as a social unit within the society.

Works Cited

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